By - Shilpa Shah (16 years) 1986
Jain Study Center of North Carolina

THE PHILOSOPHY OF KARMA

Karma is what causes the soul to feel pleasure and pain. It limits the soul's perceptions and determines the person's life span and physical features. It also prevents the soul from liberating from the cycle of reincarnation. It is our karma that causes us to be reborn again and again and determines the sort of life we must live. Karma is a type of matter. Karma particles are very fine and are not perceptible to the senses. The soul is covered with particles of karma. It has been covered with karma since the beginning of time. It goes on acquiring new karma from the universe and exhausting old karma into the universe at every moment through its thoughts, speech, and action.

The karmic matter covering the soul is known as the casual body. This casual body changes at every moment as old karma is exhausted and new karma is acquired. At the time of death, the soul is accompanied by its casual body. The casual body determines the soul's new life as it leaves behind its old physical body.

There are two main types of karma: ghati karma and aghati karma. There are four types of ghati karma: jnanavarnia karma darsanavania karma, mohniya karma, and antaraya karma. Jnanvarnia karma limits the soul's knowledge. Darsanavania karma limits the soul's vision. Mohniya karma prevents the soul from knowing its own true nature. Antarya karma obstructs the soul's natural energy, preventing it from liberating and from doing something good and enjoyable.

There are also four types of aghati karma: vedniya karma, ayu karma, nama karma, and gotra karma. Vedniya karma obscures the blissful nature of the soul, producing pleasure and pain. Ayu karma determines the life span of the body. Nama karma determines the body's physical features and limitations. Gotra karma determines the person's family, social status, living conditions, and so forth.

The soul acquires karma by ingnorance, lack of self restraint, passions, conceit, lust, unmindfulness, and activities of the mind and body. Jainism says that it is the person's intention behind his action that acquires karma and not merely the action itself. For example, a person who accidently kills someone in a car accident does not aquire as much karma as a person who murders someone; however, a person who even thinks about murdering someone acquires as much karma as someon who actually murders someone.

The soul can prevent acquiring new karma by overcoming desire, restraining the mind and body, forgiveness, chastity, truth, purity, forgiveness, austerity, renounciation, unattachment, and religious meditation.

All karma are exhausted by producing their results when the time comes. However, by then new karma attaches to the soul, causing difficulty for the soul to be liberated. In order to be
liberated, it is therefore necessary to exhaust all karmas before they produce results. This exhaustion is called nirjara.

Nirjara is to be done by two types of rigorous austerities: external and internal. External austerities include complete absence of eating and drinking, reduction in quantity of food eaten, control of desire, unattachment to the taste of foods, control of passions, and sitting in a lonely place with senses withdrawn.

Internal austerities include removing anger, greed, ego, deceit, etc., appropriate behavior towards the teacher, selfless service to the suffering and deserving, unattachment to the body, reading religious books, and religious meditation.

When a person attains keval jnan or supreme knowledge he has destroyed all of his ghati karmas but not his aghati karmas. He destroys his aghati karmas at the time of his death. The person becomes siddha and goes to moksha, the place where liberated souls reside. This liberating death is called nirvana.